

Tennessee State Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
Statement on the Reorganization of Public Higher Education in Tennessee
August 25, 2009

The Tennessee State Conference of the AAUP supports the goals outlined in “Investing in People: Tennessee’s Commitment to 21st Century Higher Education Excellence,” a report submitted to Governor Don Sundquist in May 1999 by the Governor’s Council on Excellence in Higher Education. The report states:

Tennessee’s Twenty-first Century system of higher education should elevate the overall knowledge level of the state, open wide the door to high quality advanced education for all Tennesseans, and motivate them to take advantage of this enhanced opportunity.

Joining in the common pursuit of these noble goals, we value Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFS), an association of the four-year state university Senates, as a model of faculty participation in higher-education governance. We commend TUFS for putting their vast professional expertise and educational experience at the service of the state of Tennessee in their draft “Position Paper on the Reorganization of Higher Education in Tennessee,” which has been sent to the universities' senates for consideration and ratification. Finally, we recognize TUFS as the body representing the Senates of our state’s four-year public universities and as an indispensable participant in all discussions concerning higher education in Tennessee.

The Tennessee State Conference of AAUP is open to faculty members from all types of higher-education institutions, including community colleges and technical centers. Recognizing that the community colleges may have a different perspective on reorganization, and in the spirit of shared governance, we urge the community colleges to form a representative body similar to TUFS to ensure that their unique perspectives (for example on recommendation IV.9 of the TUFS position paper) will be heard. The AAUP offers both organizational and financial support toward convening a meeting of the community colleges for that purpose.

The AAUP believes that all efforts at reorganizing higher education in Tennessee should be based on shared governance, the idea that appropriately shared responsibility and cooperative action among the essential stakeholders of an higher-education system not only advance the system’s academic mission but also, by guaranteeing the timely and proper use of all available expertise, contribute to system efficiency and rationality. Thus, we recommend that shared governance be both an integral part of any reorganization plan and the essence of the process by which a proposed plan is designed. Only by establishing shared governance in the reorganization process can the full benefits of this principle be realized.

Such a focus on joint thought and action supports a high-quality education, prevents the dissipation of available resources, entails shared measures of accountability, encourages institutional efficiencies, and develops a sense of institutional and system ownership among all stakeholders that is crucial to strengthening the sense of community on which higher education thrives.

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